



# RIVERSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

Prepared for  
**Cambridge Community Development Department**  
by  
**Stull and Lee, Inc.**

Bluestone Planning Group, Rizzo Associates, Urban Strategies Inc.



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April 2003

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Riverside Study Committee and the  
Cambridge Community Development  
Department

by  
Stull and Lee, Inc.  
in association with  
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Rizzo Associates  
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## **RIVERSIDE STUDY COMMITTEE**

### **Riverside Residents**

Saundra Graham, Co-chair  
Carol Bankard  
Phyllis Baumann  
Cob Carlson  
Bridget Dinsmore  
Joan Qualls Harris  
\*Jennifer Hrabchak  
\*Rick Lamb  
Joyce Singer  
\*Alexandra Tyszka  
Stefanie Van Pelt  
Dano Weisbord  
Jessie Wenning  
Alec Wysoker

### **Business Representative**

Lawrence Adkins  
(also resident)

### **Institutional Representatives**

Janet Kendrick, Cambridge  
Community Center  
Mary Power, Harvard University  
\*Travis McCready, Harvard University

### **CDD Staff**

Stuart Dash, Co-Chair  
Roger Boothe  
Beth Rubenstein  
Elaine Thorne

\* No longer member of committee

## **CONSULTANT TEAM**

### **Stull and Lee, Inc.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2000, a group of Riverside residents filed a petition which requested an 18-month moratorium on development in an area of Riverside along the Charles River roughly two blocks deep and extending from River Street to DeWolfe Street. The purpose of the moratorium was to provide time for the city and residents to study potential development impacts. In conjunction with adoption of the moratorium, Cambridge City Council authorized the Riverside Neighborhood Study.

After public advertisement for volunteers, a Study Committee was appointed by the City Manager and was charged with carrying out the study, working with Cambridge Community Development (CCD) staff and a consultant team retained by the City of Cambridge. The Study Committee included 13 Riverside residents, one business representative (who is also a resident), two institutional representatives (from the Cambridge Community Center and Harvard University) and four CCD staff members. From April 2001 to the present, the Committee held 16 meetings, all open to the public. The Committee and CCD also hosted two community-wide workshops that were very well attended. The Committee analyzed neighborhood issues and opportunities, explored numerous alternative development scenarios and arrived at a set of recommendations.

The Riverside Neighborhood Study report represents the 18-month effort of the Riverside Study Committee. Beginning in April 2001 the Committee, with the assistance of the Cambridge Community Development Department and the consultant team retained by the City of Cambridge, arrived at a set of zoning, transportation and general urban design recommendations. The

Committee looked broadly at neighborhood-wide issues and more in depth at future development options for several key sites that were of paramount interest to members of the Committee and community at large.

This 2002 Riverside Neighborhood Study addresses many of the issues cited in the 1992 Riverside Neighborhood Study, produced by the Cambridge Community Development Department and the 1992 Riverside Neighborhood Study Committee.

A number of concerns and goals articulated in the 1992 study were also considered key by the present Committee:

- Maintaining existing density and character
- Creation of more affordable housing, family housing and opportunities for home ownership
- Town/Gown relationships and institutional expansion into the neighborhood
- Traffic congestion
- Zoning

**Issues.** The major issues addressed by the Committee included: neighborhood character and scale; affordable housing; type and location of commercial uses; open space; institutional expansion; traffic and parking. In addition to neighborhood-wide issues, the Committee focused on three special sites: Mahoney's Garden Center on Memorial Drive; The NStar complex on Memorial Drive; and a group of parcels on Banks, Grant, Athens and Cowperthwaite streets. These special sites are all owned or under Purchase & Sale Agreement by Harvard University. Resident members of the Committee want to insure that the University develops the sites in a way that is compatible with their vision for Riverside.

**Goals.** The following goals, developed by members of the Riverside Study Committee, represent the majority of the Committee members' vision for the neighborhood and, to a great extent, those of the community as expressed at the two neighborhood-wide visioning sessions.

#### *Character/Scale*

- Maintain and enhance Riverside's residential character and scale of two- and three-story houses

#### *Housing*

- Prevent the loss of existing housing
- Encourage local home ownership
- Preserve residential diversity
- Preserve affordable housing
- Create new affordable housing that is in harmony with its surroundings

#### *Commercial*

- Preserve "mom-and-pop" businesses
- Allow for ground floor commercial uses along River Street and Western Avenue

#### *Institutional Expansion*

- Mitigate problems caused by institutional expansion

#### *Open Space*

- Preserve and promote public open space
- Preserve and promote access to the river

#### *Charles River*

- Recognize the centrality of the Charles River as a recreational and ecological urban asset for all of Cambridge

#### *Transportation*

- Mitigate existing traffic and parking problems and the impacts of any new development

The Committee's recommendations fall into three general categories: (1) zoning changes, (2) transportation related actions and (3) general recommendations.

**Recommendations.** The following recommendations for zoning changes were formally adopted by a substantial majority of the Committee members.

**Area 1 - Mahoney Blocks** (roughly bounded by Memorial Drive, Akron Street, Banks Street and Western Avenue): Rezone from C -3 to a new zoning district, Special Residence C -X.

**Committee Objectives.** The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the recommended zoning for this area can be summarized as follows:

- Preclude development that would adversely impact the neighborhood
- Provide views of the river
- Prevent dense development facing the river
- Provide an incentive to encourage public open space on site
- Prevent the development of dormitories
- Exclude high traffic generators
- Create some affordable housing through Inclusionary Zoning
- Provide an appropriate transition between the residential neighborhood and the river

**Area 2 - NStar** (bounded by Memorial Drive, Western Avenue, Blackstone Street and the Technology Center parcel): Rezone from O -3 to a new zoning district, Special Residence C -Y.

**Committee's Objectives.** The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the recommended zoning can be summarized as follows:

- Preclude development that would adversely impact the neighborhood
- Provide views of the river

- Prevent dense development facing the river
- Prevent the development of dormitories
- Exclude high traffic generators
- Create some affordable housing through Inclusionary Zoning
- Provide an appropriate transition between the residential neighborhood and the river

*Area 3 - Western Avenue, Kinnard, Green and Franklin Streets* (an irregular-shaped area located west of Central Square): Rezone from C -2 to C -1.

*Committee Objectives.* The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the recommended zoning can be summarized as follows:

- Preserve the scale of the neighborhood by preventing large-scale development
- Minimize parking and traffic problems

*Area 4 - River Street and a portion of Western Avenue* (Western Avenue from Jay to Howard streets and River Street from Putnam Avenue to Williams Street): Rezone from Business A to a new zoning district, Neighborhood Business (NB).

*Committee Objectives.* The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the recommended zoning can be summarized as follows:

- Bring zoning into conformance with existing uses and dimensions
- Allow retail use without adversely affecting traffic and parking situation

*Area 5 - Putnam and Western Avenues; Banks, Elmer and Hingham Streets* (bounded by Peabody Terrace, Putnam Avenue, Western Avenue, and Mahoney's): rezone from C -3 to C -1.

*Committee Objectives.* The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the

recommended zoning can be summarized as follows:

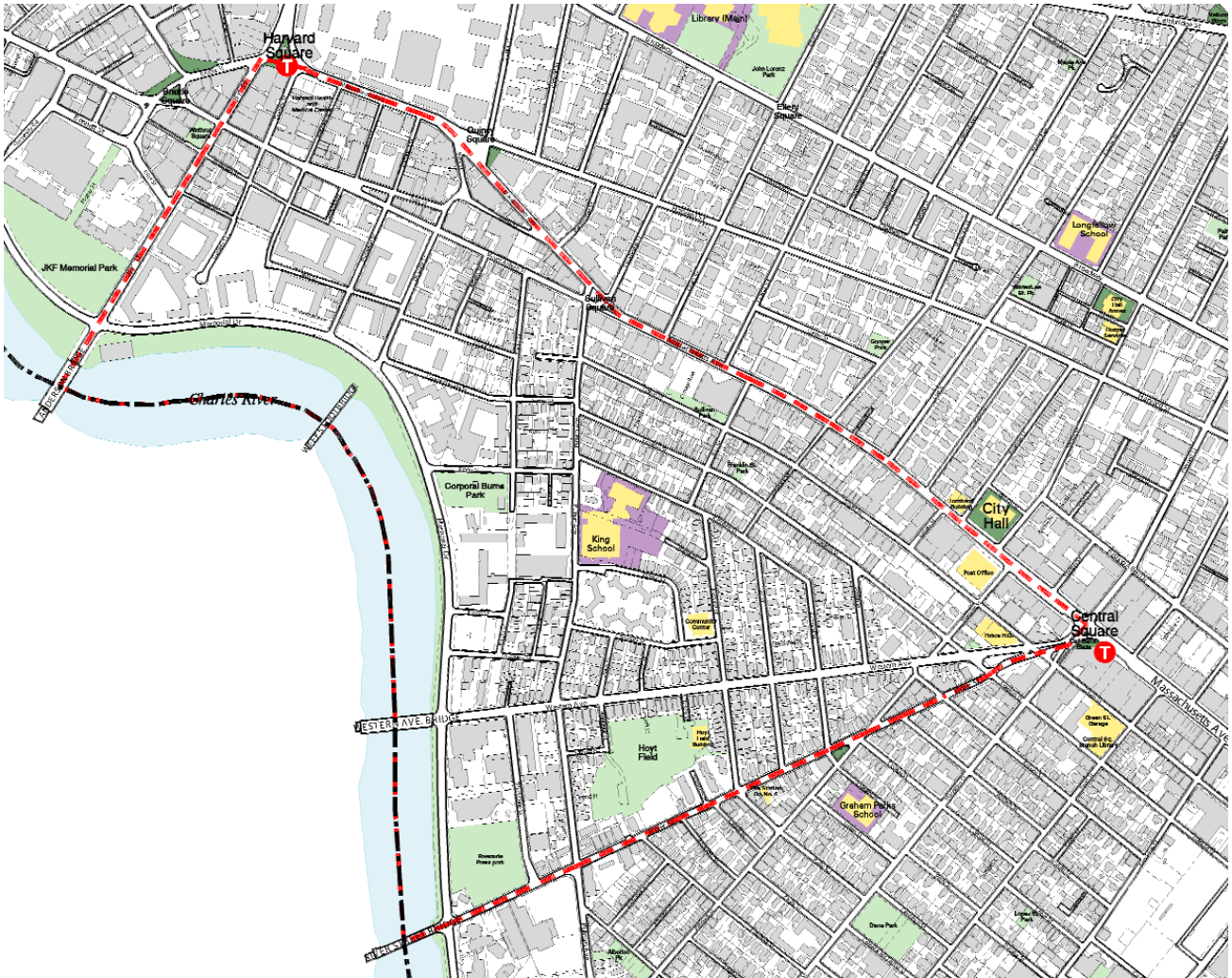
- Bring zoning into conformance with existing uses and dimensions
- Prevent further institutional encroachment in the neighborhood

*Area 6 - Banks, Grant, Athens, Mt. Auburn, and Cowperthwaite Streets* (roughly bounded by Mt. Auburn, Banks, and Cowperthwaite streets and Harvard properties to the west): Rezone from C -3 to a new zoning district, Special Residence C -Z.











*Committee Objectives.* The majority of the Committee members' objectives for the recommended zoning can be summarized as follows:

- Replicate the existing pattern of housing on small lots
- Discourage dormitory development

The Committee's zoning recommendations were presented to the Planning Board on June 18, 2002, and submitted separately to the City Council as a neighborhood zoning petition, the Carlson petition, on September 23, 2002.



*Study Area Map*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Open Water         |  Rail Line             |
|  Building Footprint |  Parcel Line           |
|  Public Building    |  Edge of Pavement      |
|  Open Space         |  Parking Lot           |
|  Cemetery           |  Neighborhood Boundary |
|  School Playground  |  City Boundary         |
|  Urban Plaza        |  MBTA Red Line         |

